

By Congressman Kevin McCarthy

No matter what the year, the 11th day of September will always be a tragic remembrance in America's cultural history. Every American can remember where they were and what they were doing in 2001 while they watched the appalling events of the day unfold. Consequently, while the day will always be remembered for those who were lost, we cannot forget how patriotic every American felt shortly thereafter. It was this ardent response that inspired in many an incredible sense of commitment to our country, our freedom, and those sacred ideals our country was founded upon.

We all have had a close friend or family member that was among those to volunteer to serve our country. Whether in the U.S. Army, Marines, Air Force or Navy, these brave men and women sacrificed their comfortable American lifestyles for hardships that we in the States can hardly even imagine. Why? Simply put, they cherished our way of life. They valued our freedom of choice and faith. And without being asked, they decided to protect it with their lives.

Let me share with you the loyalty of one of our local Kern County heroes, U.S. Marine Corporal Wesley Barrientos of Bakersfield, California. He honorably undertook three separate tours of duty in Iraq. Tragically, in 2007, his service was abruptly halted when his vehicle rolled over a roadside bomb. But Barrientos was a survivor; he endured the amputation of both of his legs. Needless to say, when he returned home to his family, he was forever changed.

Admirably, our community was there to support their wounded warrior. On August 23, 2010, through the non-profit organization Homes For Our Troops and strong local community support, Wesley and his wife were introduced to their brilliantly-built new home in southwest Bakersfield. Carefully constructed with over 90 percent of the building materials coming from donations, its amenities include an accessible stovetop and kitchen so that as he says, "I can do whatever I want here...I have the freedom to do everything and they gave me that."

I find it compelling that he uses the word "freedom." If it were not for soldiers like Barrientos, Americans would not enjoy the liberty we have grown so accustomed to. So look in the mirror and ask yourself, "How committed am I to my country, America?" And then find a way to support our troops who serve us around the world or locally. We must never forget September 11, 2001.